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ABSTRACT

This paper examines what pedagogical issues mean to practicing teachers, discussing the ethics of purpose, rules and principles, and probability, and noting teachers' philosophical perspectives and practical interpretations. Interviews were conducted with 20 Finnish secondary school teachers working in urban schools during an in-service training on ethical issues in teaching. Teachers described a work situation in which they had difficulty deciding what to do from an ethical point of view, and they answered questions about relationships, contexts, and solutions to the dilemmas. Researchers visited the teachers in their schools, observed the reported situations, and interviewed students. This paper highlights one case in which a teacher had to handle a smoking-related dilemma (students and teachers smoking in school even through it was against the law). Her interpretations of the rules and principles were the most important source of standards guiding her professional practice. She needed different ethical perspectives to inform her decision making. She felt that all possible solutions led to even further problems with colleagues and students, but she felt some action had to be taken. In the end, when she could not find the right solution, she justified doing nothing in order to avoid further harm. (Contains 46 references.) (SM)

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'Thinking Things Through' - Coming to Grips with Philosophical and Prudential Perspectives in Teachers' Educational Practice

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'Thinking Things Through' - Coming to Grips with Philosophical and Prudential Perspectives in Teachers' Educational Practice

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ABSTRACT This paper explores three interpretations from the field of philosophy and ethics. We focus on *the ethic of purpose*, *the ethic of rules and principles*, and *the ethic of probability*, together with their philosophical perspectives and practical interpretations. We aim to interpret and translate teachers' understandings from the language they use, and to give concrete expressions to these interpretations by their daily actions. Our goal is to present how the frames of theoretical reference can be translated into the frames of practical reference, and how this interpretation can help teachers to understand their teaching practice better.

INTRODUCTION

Educators are called upon to mediate upon many private and public interests that pertain to personal, professional, organizational, and societal values. This work of mediating conflicting values relates to guarding and promoting the best interests of a student. But what is meant when we say we are making decisions in the best interest of students? Each of the philosophical, ethical, and pedagogical justification contributes content and meaning to the phrase. While each of these perspectives deserves consideration, in this paper we limit ourselves to an exploration of three interpretations from the field of philosophy and ethics. We focus on *the ethic of purpose*, *the ethic of rules and principles*, and *the ethic of probability*, together with their philosophical perspectives and practical interpretations (Walker, 1998).

Our goal is to determine what and how pedagogical issues mean to teachers in practice. We aim to interpret and translate teachers' understandings from the language they use, and to give concrete expressions to these interpretations by their daily ethical actions (Bernstein, 1992). In this effort, Pring (2000) argues, it is necessary to pay attention to the nature of 'educational practice' and the distinctive language and values through which such a practice can be understood and evaluated. We need to ask what *educational* practice actually means? And that requires, according to Pring (2000), "a little more philosophical homework than is normally given" (p. 497).

Educational research cannot escape philosophical questions about the nature of an 'educational practice' and thus of 'educational inquiry'. The nature of the language used to describe educational practice by researchers needs to be related to the language of the teachers through which they understand and define the reality of the school life. The process of 'educational practice' will be different for individual teachers as they approach it from different starting points and different perceptions. The procedure presents many kinds of complexities. As Gauthier (1963) has remarked, "the sphere of the practical is necessarily the sphere of the uncertain" (p. 1). A practical problem is "a problem about what to do ... whose final solution is found only in doing something, in acting" (p. 49).

Young (1999) has argued that because most educational studies take place within a single theoretical framework, the findings of these studies do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the problems being researched (cf. e.g. Ball, 1994; Rist, 1994; Scheurich & Young, 1997). In response to this problem, she argues in favor of using more than one theoretical approach to examine and analyze the same issues. The process of analyzing and interpreting the data through different frames provides a forum for comparing the similarities and differences in the findings that emerge from different perspectives. This multifocal process involves viewing from one lens and subsequently reconsidering the phenomena from another.

In this paper, our frames of reference are three interpretations from philosophy and ethics. We argue that the use of more than one theoretical approach will expand and complement our traditional approaches in educational studies. The practice may help us better understand the ethical problems we study; the dynamics of educational contexts; and value the impact of different ethical approaches on teachers and students. We also hope that using more than one theoretical approach will increase the trustworthiness of research findings because each approach can serve as a check on the other. Thus, as Young (1999) emphasizes, "inaccurate assumptions and problematic interpretations should be more easily revealed, and tenets formerly accepted as given are more likely to be questioned" (p. 679). As a result, our ability to construct the ethical dilemmas in education should be moved to a level of deeper understanding.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: IN PURSUIT OF PRACTICAL RELEVANCE IN TEACHING

Within German and Scandinavian *didactic* tradition, the organization of schooling assumes that both teachers and students consciously position themselves in the teaching-learning nexus (Kansanen, Tirri, Meri, Krokfors, Husu & Jyrhämä, 2000; Westbury, Hopmann & Riquarts, 2000). Teachers are expected not only to consider questions about what to teach and how to teach; they are also expected to consider questions which ask 'why' and 'to what end'. This makes teaching a reflective practice, and accordingly, school teaching is "deemed to be an interpretative or deliberative science - a branch of moral or social philosophy" (Hamilton, 2001, p. 121). This chapter provides three interpretative lenses for this deliberation.

The ethic of purpose

The development of an interpretative account on practical issues starts from the ethic of purpose. Without this standpoint, Nash (1996) argues, a coherent ethical dialogue between ourselves and the world cannot take place. The perspective is intended to provide a self-understanding that can lead to an adequately informed and defensible ethical action.

Here the ethical dilemmas are understood from the teleological perspective. According to Aristotle, determination of a proper purpose or *telos* (final end) can help people define the best interests of their fellow men. As Walker (1998) emphasizes, "[t]he attention of this ethic is on the agent and the act" (p. 297). He explains that in educational settings a particular decision is justified if it facilitates the development of students' individual potentials as human beings. Both the educators themselves are evaluated and people outside the profession evaluate them with the ethic of purpose in mind. According to this ethic, the purpose of educational institutions resides in the conscious potential, which in turn directs the organization's resources and its practical actions.

Nash (1996) calls this the "first moral language" or the language of "grounding beliefs". It gives us an opportunity to identify some important systems of schooling and their accompanying claims. It also provides a chance to examine the underlying assumptions why something is regarded as right or wrong. Within this realm teachers develop a more or less comprehensive and coherent account of their ethical convictions. It is important for them, as professionals (Sockett, 1993), to be both conscious of and able to articulate these fundamental sources of their working ethics.

Taylor (1992) speaks about these realms as a person's "background of intelligibility", those "moral horizons against which things take on significance for us"

(p. 37). In many cases it is a world we know only dimly. According to Coombs (1998, p. 563), the process involves encountering a situation in which a choice is required, and about which a person has a certain intuition or "gut reaction" concerning the right choice to make. The approach argues that we have a sort of underlying and intuitive judgement which guides our practical actions.

This perspective is not meant for immediate utility (Nash (1996, p. 40). Its premises are not meant to straightforwardly apply to the analysis and resolution of a particular ethical dilemma. That will come later. Its task is to provide an essential basis for further levels of ethical reasoning.

The ethic of rules and principles

Practical dilemmas can also be viewed from a deontological or principle-based perspective. The approach "judges educational decisions according to implicit and explicit rules and duties owed (Walker, 1998, p. 298). The aim is defined by *a priori* duties, rules, and principles. The focus tends to be, as Walker points out, "on the policy decisions (means) and on the educator's conformity to an ethical principle or a set of rules" (ibid.).

Philosophically the stance can be linked to Kant. Among philosophers he is mostly associated with the notion that one should act according to a maxim that would aptly become a universal rule for all. This rule of universality, or the "categorical imperative", was formulated in his doctrine of respect for persons (Kant 1785/1983). The deontological approach appeals to certain rules and principles as being good in themselves. These principles are regarded as valid independently of whether or not they produce benefits or maximize good consequences.

The perspective of principles is, according to Nash (1996, p. 110), "a 'thin' moral language" and it is procedural by its nature (Reid, 1979). It relies not on metaphysical accounts of morality, but on abstract, general and principled accounts of appropriate guidelines of how to act. Thus, the stance requires teachers to agree on ethical courses of action based on a set of general rules and principles. They provide a general guide to action, and a certain authority in ethical decision-making.

Whenever asked what these principles are, teachers tend to speak in simple maxims, which for them can be desirable rules of conduct. Be caring. Be available when your pupils need you. Practice what you preach, and so. These general principles and rules can be seen as the underpinnings for such formal principles as thoughtfulness, accessibility, and coherence. As action guides, these principles indicate the rights and obligations that are at stake in a dilemma. Nash (1996) argues that they can clarify and justify the solutions to problems because they "provide the standards by which ethical actions and decisions are made" (p. 111).

Coombs (1998) has reviewed the literature of educational ethics and concludes that the real test of the approach is the way it helps the educator respond to real-life, specific problems. In practice it is difficult to explicate a principle in such a way that it can encompass all the various kinds of actions that will and will not count as instances of acting according to the principle. Simply knowing the principle does not tell the educator whether his or her interpretation of a problem is desirable or justifiable. This is because, according to Hamilton (2001, p. 122), the steering of practice is never as secure as the following of procedural rules and principles. Practice is intrinsically uncertain and risky. The 'truth status' of practical premises is always less secure than the status of more abstract and propositional statements. Their 'truth' is assumed, rather than guaranteed, and its analysis always contains an implicit term.

The ethic of probability

Practical dilemmas can also be interpreted through a calculation of the probable positive and negative consequences (short and long term) of a particular educational decision. Once the likely outcomes are predicted, the alternatives that provide the greatest benefit and least harm may be chosen.

Philosophically the stance is backed by utilitarian perspectives. Utilitarians such as Mill (1861/1979) are concerned primarily with the results of an activity. According to simple utilitarianism, one may judge the best way by determining which policy decision is likely to produce the greatest utility for the greatest number of people. In other words, the best interests of students are served if the negative consequences are minimized and positive benefits are maximized (Walker, 1998, p. 300). The problem of attaining fair and just resolution that also works usually means balancing the pros and cons of the conflict. The problems usually compel us to choose between competing goals and values. We may choose a solution that aims to maximize the desired results across a range of students involved, but some will suffer at the expense of others.

The process through which this is achieved resembles "practical reasoning" (Carlgren & Lindblad, 1991; Pendlebury, 1993) and "deliberation" (Johnston, 1993). It shows that problems teachers face in their work relate most closely to the class of questions that are referred as "uncertain practical questions" (Gauthier, 1963). According to Reid (1979, p. 188-9), they are problems that usually have many common features: i) They are problems that have to be answered - even if the answer is to decide to do nothing. ii) The grounds on which decisions should be made are uncertain. Nothing can tell us infallibly which method should be used, what evidence should be taken into account or rejected, what kinds of arguments should be given precedence. iii) We always have to take the existing state of affairs into account. We

are never free from past or present contexts and their arrangements. iv) Each problem is in some ways unique, belonging to a specific time and context, the particulars of which we can never exhaustively describe. v) We can never predict the outcome of the particular solution we choose, still less know what the outcome would have been had we made a different choice.

Buchmann (1987) calls these particulars the "folkways of teaching." She argues that the knowledge base of teaching cannot be considered special and that adults on both sides, teachers and parents, are often ambivalent about its real value (p. 152). Teachers feel not only entitled, but also forced, to use their common sense in teaching. However, this does not mean to belittle teachers' professional knowledge. The point is just to suggest that the knowledge teachers use cannot be placed on either side of the divide between "specialized knowledge which particular individuals need in their occupational roles and common knowledge which all adult individuals need as members of the community" (Znaniecki 1965, p. 25). It is a question of collaboration between various parties of the community.

Lampert (1985) speaks about "dilemma managing" in which teachers cannot choose a solution to a problem without comprising other goals they want to accomplish. Teachers cannot see their goals as a neat dichotomy and their job as making clear choices. In many cases, teachers' aims for any particular student are entangled with teachers' aims for each of the others in the class and in the school's professional community

METHOD AND DATA

The data included 20 interview case reports of conflicts experienced by secondary school teachers. All these teachers worked in urban public schools in the capital area of Helsinki, Finland. The data was gathered during an in-service training session on ethical issues in teaching. Teachers were asked to tell about a real-life dilemma they had experienced in their work. The request was formulated in the following way: "Describe a situation in your work in which you have had difficulties deciding what to do from an ethical point of view." In addition, teachers were provided with some detailed questions about the relationships, context and solution to the dilemma. All the audio taped interviews were transcribed and coded using the reading guide method. After the training session, researchers visited teachers in their schools. During the visits, they observed the reported situations and conducted short interviews concerning the issue with three to five students in each school.

In this paper, we have chosen one case study of a practical dilemma from the whole data set, a narrative told by a female teacher which was shown to be very difficult for the teachers to solve. This particular case has been analyzed using a hermeneutical approach (Gadamer, 1976) to better understand the multifocal perspectives in teachers' ethical reflection. According to Bernstein (1992), the goal of the hermeneutical approach to ethics is to determine what issues mean to us and to interpret and translate this understanding from the language being used. It aims to give concrete expressions to these interpretations through our daily ethical actions. Hermeneutics derives from the Greek *hermeneuein*, "to interpret into one's own idiom, to give expression to, to attribute meaning to." We also share Nash's (1996, pp. 56-57) argument that the world of ethics is an endlessly interpretable world, and there is rarely a final or definite response to an ethical dilemma.

Reading guide

In the analysis, we have adopted a qualitative reading guide to examine the ethical frameworks underlying teachers' practical reflection in the case of smoking. The reading guide is based on the evidence that persons simultaneously know (can recognize, speak in, and respond to) various different perspectives in discussing practical issues and may show a preference for one over the other (Brown *et al.*, 1989, 1991; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Johnston, 1989). Evidence of the ability of individuals to speak in various perspectives suggests that the narrative self (Bruner, 1995) is multi-voiced and involved in choices about how to speak. In reading texts, we regard persons as active agents with respect to the concerns about their relationship they present and those they keep silent. The reading guide aims to highlight the various ethical perspectives, as well as the sense of tension people often convey in their case reports of lived experiences. Thus, it is a voice-sensitive method that attempts to record the complexity of case reports of practical conflicts and choice, and attempts to capture the personal, relational, and cultural dimensions of lived experiences (Brown *et al.*, 1991, p. 29). The reading guide focuses on interpreting the narrator's way of seeing and speaking of the phenomenon.

The method focuses on the reading process and the creation of an interpretative account of a narrative case report. According to Bahktin (1981), individual words and phrases that are used to describe thought, feeling, and action are meaningless in and of themselves to explain a particular meaning (p. 276). Therefore, as Brown *et al.* (1991) interpret, "[t]he living language exists only in a web of interrelationships that allow a narrator's meaning to become clear only if the context, the narrative, is maintained" (p. 27). Thus, it is only by allowing language to exist in

narrative relationships that it is possible to interpret and understand another's experiences.

Interpretative procedures

The Reading Guide aims to provide an approach to interpreting case reports of conflict and choice. It allows a reader to specify the ways in which a person chooses between or lives with conflict and choice. The author read the story a total of twelve consecutive times from three ethical perspectives. Each perspective consisted of four consecutive readings that aimed to uncover the various relational aspects of the moral dilemma in question. In the course of the interpretations many points in the interviews were coded up to six or eight times. The three perspectives and their multiple readings provided a practical frame of reference to the investigated dilemma by analyzing it from different philosophical and ethical viewpoints. Table I presents the three perspectives together with their consecutive readings.

Table I. The interpretative procedures of the reading guide.

I perspective: The ethic of purpose
This perspective tries to uncover the final ends of the pedagogical practice in question. According to this stance, within the domain of moral judgement, a global assessment comes before specific practical actions. The perspective focuses on the narrator's expressed concerns about the sources of the problem. It is a question of attitudes and attitudes revealed in actions to work out, or live with, the problems faced. Solutions to them can often be searched by an interactive consideration of means and ends. The first four comprehensive readings aim to uncover *what lies behind the practical dilemma?*

II perspective: The ethic of rules and principles
The second perspective aims to reveal the practical action guides teachers rely on. Rules and principles are usually brief statements of what to do or what should be done in a particular situation encountered in practice. The major purpose of the perspective is to justify or defend educational decisions based on certain appropriate rules and principles. The four consecutive readings provide the answer to the problem *what are the profession's code of ethics regarding the practical dilemma?*

III perspective: The ethic of probability
The third perspective investigates the emergent dilemmas when rules and principles are put into practice. What kind of pedagogical dilemmas arise, and how do teachers try to cope with these situations? The stance focuses on the evaluation of the taken or intended actions and their possible results. Solutions to conflicts are often found only by doing something, by acting. The last four readings concentrate on the issue *what are the practical choices in a dilemma?*

After each reading, the author filled in a summary worksheet. For the reader the worksheets provided a place to document relevant pieces of the text and make interpretative remarks. The worksheets were intended to emphasize the move from the narrator's written words to a reader's interpretation or summary of them. They require the reader to substantiate her/his interpretation with quotes from the written story itself. As such, the worksheets stand between the written story and the generalized main philosophical and ethical perspectives drawn from the particular cases. According to Brown *et al.* (1991), "they provide a trail of evidence from the reader's interpretations of the narrative" (p. 33).

In the final step of the reading process, the author used the summary worksheets that aim to capture the details of three philosophical and ethical perspectives in order to summarize the chosen viewpoints. Summary worksheets provide a brief interpretation of the writers' representation of their lived experiences.

Here the point is that it takes time and effort to perceive various qualities in dilemmas. They do not become visible at a glance. As Jackson (1992) has emphasized, it is a matter of becoming sensitive to how those qualities are characteristically expressed in the case report of this particular person (p. 404). The process of getting to know requires various phases of reflection. We learn various qualities "by thinking about them, by reflecting what our observations mean" (Jackson, 1992, p. 406). This notion is not unique, but the fact that the importance of that reflection is brought to the fore is worth noting. Jackson speaks about "prolonged reflection," which is as essential as the time spent gathering, transcribing, and labeling the data.

A case

The teacher behind the case report was a 37-year-old female teacher who taught history and social sciences in a large suburban school near Helsinki. She had 9 years of teaching experience and was also qualified to teach at the college level. Her enthusiasm for teaching was apparent and she was willing to talk about her thoughts and work. Her students were mainly between the age group of 13-16. Overall, she was quite satisfied with her school. She liked her students and regarded her colleagues as professionals in their own fields. However, she reported smoking to be a constant problem in her school. According to Finnish law, smoking is forbidden in schools for both teachers and students. Nobody should smoke during school hours. In her school, however, both teachers and students broke this directive in several ways. The school had tried different practices and teachers often disagreed with each other and with their students about the best practices.

The following excerpt in Table II from a teacher's interview presents this complicated situation.

Table II. The analyzed narrative

"I have been very concerned about the smoking policy in our school. I think a great number of our students smoke and many of the teachers smoke as well. This is an acute and frequent problem that I have to consider every single day in my work. Everybody knows that students smoke under the bridge that is near to our school. However, the law forbids smoking during school hours. We have this law but hardly anybody observes it. Some teachers smoke, too, and other teachers and students know it. And the law also forbids teachers smoking during school hours. Nobody really knows what to do about smoking. I know myself that smoking is bad for your health and the students know it too. It is not a question of not being informed about the negative consequences of smoking. What can I do as a single teacher to change the situation? It doesn't help to send notes home if I am the only teacher doing it. I think homes and elementary schools play a key-role in finding solutions to this problem. The complicated thing is that some teachers smoke with their students. They might even suggest a break to have a cigarette. I know that notes home and forcing students to stay in school after hours don't help the situation. I myself smoked for fifteen years, I know what I am dealing with. I have tried to be a role model for my students and I have told them about my former smoking habit. I have assured them that it is possible to quit smoking. Every single morning I walk by the bridge and tell the students to put their cigarettes away. Some of the students obey me and some don't. I have also tried to talk with my colleagues. I talked with the music teacher about a girl who has a beautiful voice. I think she could be a professional singer some day and smoking might seriously affect her voice. I asked the music teacher to talk with this girl about protecting her voice.

I don't see any concrete way to influence our school community. I should build a fence to stop the students from going to the bridge. However, then they might start to smoke in the toilets and that would be even worse for those who don't smoke. The principal should do something. We used to have a smoking room for teachers but it was shut down. Now the teachers smoke outside as well. The principal should take steps to prevent teachers from smoking during their working hours. I don't think we can solve the problem with students before we can influence the teachers."

RESULTS: IN PURSUIT OF PRUDENT PRACTICE IN TEACHING

Background beliefs - persuading stances

When the teacher was talking about responsibility, the law, rights, ideals, and professional obligations, she was actually describing her most fundamental assumptions. They guided her perception of educational practice and what she experienced as good or bad, right or wrong, important or unimportant. These assumptions seemed to be the ultimate bases by which the teacher made her decisions. From this personally held life-space the teacher experienced educational dilemmas from the vantage point of her own unique "horizon of meanings" (Barnes, 1971, p. 65). This life-space was her vantage point, her ethical center of reference. The stance lead her to question several purposes of her actions within the school context in which she worked: What was this educational organization trying to realize? What was the right way to go about this task? Did all teachers and students see the purpose in the same way? Table III provides examples of text excerpts from the first four consecutive readings using the ethic of purpose as the reading perspective.

Table III. Reading perspective: The ethic of purpose

1st reading: What lies behind the practical dilemma?
"The law forbids teachers as well as students to smoke during school hours. We have this law but hardly anybody observes it ... everybody knows that students smoke under the bridge ...some teachers smoke, too, and other teachers and students know it ... the complicated thing is that some teachers smoke with their students ... I myself smoked for fifteen years, I know what I am dealing with."

2nd reading: What are the teacher's immediate intuitions and feelings?
"I have been very concerned about the smoking policy in our school ... This is an acute and frequent problem that I have to consider every single day in my work ... The law forbids teachers as well as students smoking during school hours ... I don't see any concrete way to influence our school community ... I myself smoked for fifteen years ... I have assured students that it is possible to quit smoking."

3rd reading: To what argumentation/justification is primary importance attributed?
"The law forbids teachers as well as students smoking during school hours ... The principal should take steps to prevent teachers from smoking ... I know myself that smoking is bad for your health and the students themselves know it too ... I think students' homes and previous school levels play a key-role in finding solutions to this problem ... I myself smoked for fifteen years, I know what I am dealing with."

4th reading: What are the foreseeable consequences of the applied stances?
"Nobody really knows what to do about smoking ... I don't see any concrete ways to influence our school community ... I don't think we can solve the problem with students before we can influence the teachers ... I have tried to be a role model for my students ... I have assured them that it is possible to quit smoking.

McCadden (1998) calls organizational morality the basis of teachers' practical actions in school settings. He defines organizational morality as the teacher's belief that her/his role as a teacher demands that s/he instills in her/his students an adherence to public school life (p. 35). It concerns ideas as to what students need to learn socially about school life. They are things that students need in their life: For example, what does it mean to act legally, what are the consequences of breaking the norm? According to the Finnish curricular guidelines, the social preparation of students comes prior to a concentration on academic work in the progression of school studies. The aim is not to educate children to become 'good students' but active and decent future citizens. From this perspective, organizational morality can be seen as socially constructed among members of the teaching profession.

As the excerpts and their interpretative comments in Table III indicated, practical dilemmas were presented to the teacher - from outside - in the sense that they involved others. But conflicts were also subjective - inside the teacher - in that they each brought a unique center of reference to these issues. The teacher reported that she had smoked for fifteen years and she was very concerned about the smoking policy in her school. Despite the lack of collegial support at the organizational level she was confident that students could quit their smoking habit.

Standards of action guides - commanding stances

In looking for evidence of rules and principles, we were not interested primarily in statements having the outward form of a rule or a principle, but rather in the way such statements operate in structuring the teacher's knowledge (cf. Elbaz, 1983; Tirri, Husu & Kansanen, 1999). At first sight, the teacher's statements might look like a mere description, yet they functioned as a rule or principle, or sometimes in both ways simultaneously. Rules and principles told the teacher what to do and/or how to act and react in certain specific situations.

The stance functioned as a guide of action and presented an authority in the teacher's decision-making. The perspective was basically procedural. It led the teacher to identify the relevant, yet often implicit principle, apply it to the case, and act accordingly. On this level the teacher relied on implications which guided her educational decision-making. She identified herself as a principled professional that had a set of norms by which she lived and which she was willing to stand by and defend.

Rules and principles could be highly specific and/or they could by applied to broader situations. In both cases rules and principles made reference to the details of the situations to which they related. They could be derived from a wide variety of

sources. The basic starting point was naturally the legal directive which prohibited both teachers and students from smoking during school hours. Despite its normative force the law was unable to govern their action. Table IV provides examples of text excerpts from the four consecutive readings using the ethics of rules and principles as an interpretative perspective.

Table IV. Reading perspective: The ethic of rules and principles

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5th reading: What are the profession's code of ethics regarding the case?
"Everybody knows that students smoke under the bridge ... some teachers smoke, too ... some teachers smoke with their students ... the law forbids students smoking during school hours ... the law also forbids teachers smoking ... The principal should do something ... and prevent them [teachers] from smoking ... I don't think we can solve the problem with students before we can influence the teachers."

6th reading: What workplace norms and role expectations are involved?
"The law forbids smoking during school hours ... everybody knows that students smoke under the bridge ... every single morning I walk by the bridge and tell the students to put their cigarettes away ... The principal should take steps to prevent teachers from smoking."

7th reading: Are there any viable alternatives?
"Everybody knows that students smoke under the bridge ... some teachers smoke with their students. The teachers might even suggest a break to have a cigarette ... We have this law but hardly anybody observes it ... Nobody really knows what to do about smoking ... What can I do as a single teacher to change the situation? It doesn't help to send notes home if I am the only teacher doing it.

8th reading: What are the foreseeable consequences of the applied rules and principles?
"Nobody really knows what to do about smoking ... we cannot solve the problem with students before we can influence the teachers ... We used to have a smoking room for teachers but it was shut down ... Now the teachers smoke outside ... some teachers smoke with their students. They might even suggest a break to have a cigarette ... I don't see any concrete way of influencing our school community ... I should build a fence to stop the students from going to the bridge ... However, then they might start to smoke in the toilets and that would be even worse for those [students] who don't smoke ... I have reassured them [students] that it is possible to quit smoking ... Every single morning I walk by the bridge and tell the students to put their cigarettes away. Some of the students obey me and some don't ... I have also tried to talk with my colleagues.

As a result, what happened with this particular dilemma was that most teachers were unable to satisfy either the legal or practical requirements of the situation. More important, they fell short of examining the various implications of the dilemma in question. They consequently neglected their responsibility to perceive the issue beyond its myopic effects.

The perspective was largely a realm of reflective activity and interpretation was needed. Rules and principles were often "open-textured" by their nature (Brennan, 1977). That is, they were difficult to interpret in such an explicit manner that they could encompass the varied kinds of actions that could be counted as instances of acting on that rule and principle. Simply coming to know the principle did not tell the reader whether their interpretation of a problem was desirable or justifiable.

Skills of dilemma managing - working stances

As has been shown, the teacher's work was embedded in practical actions and was situated mainly in and between students and colleagues. The teacher had to stand in constant relation to both these parties and her emphasis was on concrete particulars. They were interpreted through the eyes of the practitioner. Consequnetly, the starting point could be formulated as "what was perceived?" To be able to consider and choose appropriate actions, the teacher had to be able to perceive her relevant features of the dilemma. These could not be transmitted in some general and abstract form because it was a matter of fitting her choices to the "complex requirements of a concrete situation" (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 303), talking all its contextual features into account.

Who the teacher was had a great deal to do with both the way she defined the dilemma and what could be done about it. The dilemma arose because the state of affairs in the school community was not what she wanted it to be. Thus, the practical nature of the dilemma involved the teacher's wish for a change, and simultaneously, her powerless reaction to the prevailing situation. Even though the teacher was influenced by many strong forces in her school community, the responsibility to act still remained.

From the teacher's point of view, the intention to act in a professionally coherent manner led to even further problems. She could not hope to arrive at the "right" solution or action in a sense that the two preceding perspectives, persuasive and commanding perspectives can be said to be "right." This is because each member of the community brought her/his own, often contradictory aims to the situation, and the resolution of their dissonance could not be neat or simple. The juxtaposition of varied views and responsibilities could easily lead to even further paradoxes. Table V provides examples of text excerpts using the ethic of probability as a reading perspective.

Table V. Reading perspective: The ethic of probability

9th reading: Why is this case a practical dilemma?
"The law forbids teachers as well as students from smoking during school hours. ... We have this law but hardly anybody observes it. ... The complicated thing is that some teachers smoke with their students. The teachers might even suggest a break to have a cigarette. ... Nobody really knows what to do about smoking. ... I don't see any concrete way of influencing our school community."

10th reading: Who are the relevant actors? How is their manner of action pedagogically relevant?
"Students smoke under the bridge ... some teachers smoke, too ... The law forbids teachers as well as students from smoking during school hours. ... The complicated thing is that some teachers smoke with their students. ... We have this law but hardly anybody observes it. ... Nobody really knows what to do about smoking ... The principal should do something. ... The principal should take steps to prevent teachers from smoking during their working hours. ... I have tried to be a role model for my students ... I myself smoked myself for fifteen years ... I have assured them that it is possible to quit smoking. Every single morning I walk by the bridge and tell the students to put their cigarettes away."

11th reading: What are the practical choices in the dilemma? To what argumentation/ justification are they attributed?
"The law forbids teachers as well as students from smoking during school hours. ... We have this law but hardly anybody observes it ... The principal should take steps to prevent teachers from smoking during their working hours ... I don't think we can solve the problem with students before we can influence the teachers ... What can I do as a single teacher to change the situation? It doesn't help ... if I am the only teacher doing it. ... I know myself that smoking is bad for your health and the students know it too. It is not a question of not being informed about the negative consequences of smoking ... I think homes and elementary schools play a key-role in finding solutions to this problem. ... I have tried to be a role model for my students ... I have assured them that it is possible to quit smoking. Every single morning I walk by the bridge and tell the students to put their cigarettes away ... I have also tried to talk with my colleagues."

12th reading: What are the foreseeable consequences of the planned/applied actions?
"Nobody really knows what to do about smoking ... I don't see any concrete way of influencing our school community ... I have tried to be a role model for my students ... Every single morning I walk by the bridge and tell the students to put their cigarettes away. Some of the students obey me and some don't. ... I don't think we can solve the problem with students before we can influence the teachers."

In practice, all the possible "solutions" seemed to lead to even further problems. The teacher felt that she could not choose a solution without comprising other goals she wanted to accomplish. Yet, she was convinced that some action had to be taken. As she revealed, the teacher did not consider the conflicts as a choice between abstract beliefs or between competing rules and principles. What she perceived were tensions between individual colleagues, and personal confrontations

between herself and a particular group of students. She could not see her basic beliefs and rules and principles as a neat and workable scheme to guide her job in making clear choices. Instead of engaging in a decision-making process that would eliminate various alternatives, she pursued a series of loose arguments with herself as she considered the consequences of the practices Her aims for any particular colleague or student were entangled with her aims for each of the others in the school context. The working perspectives were formed in a community, which provided both the professional and personal settings and structures, as well as the guiding exemplars necessary for her practical action.

SUMMARY: CONNECTING POLICY AND PRACTICE

In this paper, we have presented a case study of a practical dilemma that teachers have found difficult to deal with in their professional practice. The case of smoking has been presented through a teacher's narrative. Our aim has been to approach one case from multiple theoretical perspectives. We have adopted three interpretative viewpoints from the field of philosophy and ethics. These viewpoints have guided our analysis to focus on the ethic of purpose, the ethic of rules and principles, and the ethic of probability together with their philosophical perspectives and practical interpretations. Our analysis uncovered the background beliefs of a teacher that guided her ethical reflection with regard to smoking. These persuading stances included the teacher's own values that guided her educational practice. Furthermore, the teacher's own attitudes and concerns were identified as influential factors which affected her practical reflection.

The teacher's perceptions of the professional code of ethics were revealed in her reflection on the rules and principles guiding her educational actions in the case of smoking. The legal norms and organizational morality commanded the teacher's standards as they applied to the smoking case. However, the teacher's own interpretations of the rules and principles were identified as the most important sources of the standards guiding her professional practice.

In a practical dilemma, the teacher's skills of dilemma managing revealed her interpretation and identification of the most relevant issues concerning the case. In her working stances, the teacher could not find the "right" solution; however, she had to find some practical way to deal with the dilemma. The teacher's justification of doing nothing in order to avoid further harm revealed her ethic of probability in her practical reflection.

We can conclude that teachers use different ethical perspectives in their practical reflection. Our case of smoking provides an example of a real-life dilemma that cannot be understood using only one interpretative perspective. In real-life pedagogical dilemmas, teachers need the capability to hold together several perspectives simultaneously. They need capacities to synthesize and analyze, to hold together under a general idea and to break things down into their separate particulars (Whitehead, 1999).

Nash (1996, p. 148) has pointed out that there is a lack of integrative models in the professional literature today. According to him, teachers need some kind of justification schema with both theoretical and practical viewpoints. We have sketched this kind of schema for teachers' practical reflection in Figure 1. In this schema, real - life dilemmas are approached with both theoretical and practical reflection. The final action the teacher takes in order to solve or live with the dilemma is produced in the interplay between the theoretical and practical viewpoints.

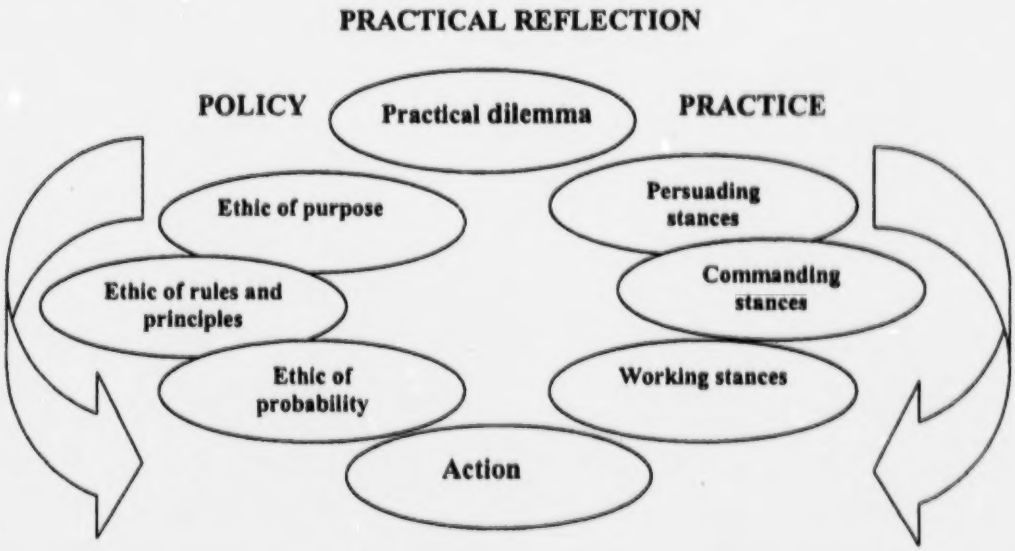

Figure 1. A justification schema for teachers' practical reflection

Our schema for teachers' practical reflection integrates the three ethical perspectives presented in the theoretical framework of this paper. The ethic of purpose reveals the persuading stances of a teacher concerning the nature of the healthy life. The ethic of rules and principles provides the commanding perspectives for the teacher to defend the healthy life. The ethic of probability provides the teacher the working stances to act in order to defend the healthy lives of her students.

We argue, in accordance with Nash (1996), that educational decisions are shaped by the interrelationship of several elements: metaphysical beliefs, virtues, personal philosophies, communities, workplace norms, circumstances, consequences, feelings, and intuitions. Our schema has integrated these elements into three practical reflection sources: persuading stances, commanding perspectives, and practical working stances (see Figure 1). In pursuit of action, teachers blend the bits and pieces of the different frameworks into a situational functioning whole.

In our case study, we have tried to explore the interrelationships of different elements in teachers' practical reflection. We have used both theoretical and empirical frameworks in order to create an integrative model of applied ethics for teachers. As our analysis revealed, smoking is a case that required different ethical perspectives to inform teachers in their decision-making. The case can also be used as a learning case in the sense that there are no absolutely indisputable decisions. Pedagogical actions cannot be 'proved', they can only be defended.

According to the results, the social processes involved in teachers' practical-moral settings are not based, to any great extent, upon pre-established ethical reasoning, but on "socially shared *identities of feeling"* that individuals create in the flow of activity between them (Shotter, 1993, p. 54). Therefore, in teaching, human actions should not be judged from a single point of view. They should also be viewed in terms of how eloquently the participants in question are able to persuade others of the validity of their judgements. The pedagogical "argument" in this art is not the construction of a "proof," as commonly assumed. Rather, the idea of "argumentation" ties together the issues debated until a course of action is found. This kind of rhetorical understanding of pedagogical reasoning enables teachers to distinguish between the different sides of conflict problems and to gain a better conception of them. Rhetorical justification is also rational, but with different degrees of certainty. It does not drive towards 'truth', it drives towards action (cf. Hamilton, 2001).

DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

The real-life dilemmas discussed in this paper can be used with both student teachers and in-service teachers as a means to discuss the diversity of real-life situations teachers face in their work. In addition to pedagogical reasoning and argumentation, teacher education programs should promote communicative action using moral discourse. Helping students to acquire dialogical competence likely requires the creation of workable means by which individuals discuss pedagogical issues. For teachers, an important task is for them to learn to analyze practical dilemmas from

different points of view in a way that allows them to become objects of conscious reflection. Therefore, what are needed are forums that emphasize the conscious analysis and articulation of moral dilemmas. As Strike (1993, p. 112) has argued, the creation of such opportunities also seeks to help students perceive pedagogical practice in a more concise manner.

According to the present research, the case report-approach can be used to promote students' dialogical understanding. Analyzing and discussing cases can help students identify pedagogical issues and articulate their choices and arguments more clearly. This process may also help them to see the worth of the social skills required for deliberation. Students may learn to listen more meaningfully, acquire a sharper sense of diversity, and respect differences of opinion. It may promote the understanding that schools are characterized by personal encounters, but they are also influenced by extrapersonal entities such as educational bureaucracies and social realities. According to Strike & Ternasky (1993, p. 217), the approach can be used as a teaching vehicle for teachers to learn an expanded understanding of pedagogical issues.

However, caution requires modesty in claiming what is possible in classroom contexts in professional programs of teacher education. It is unlikely that creating one method for the analysis and discussion of pedagogical issues will greatly alter students' characters. In this study, teachers' actions were strongly informed by their professional obligations. Moreover, teachers' own characters came to the fore - for example, in the teacher's very willingness, in the first place, to accept the professional obligation needed in the question. To be sure, teachers should be virtuous and caring persons. As leaders formulate goals of teacher education programs, they should consider not only what kinds of teachers are needed in schools but also what can be done during formal teacher education to help them to turn ethical individuals.

Important, practical reasoning cannot be learned sufficiently during formal teacher preparation. As Strike (1993) has argued, "character is the product of years, not credit hours" (p. 107). Curriculum leadership must attest to the significance of practical teaching experience and acknowledge how the continuing work in school settings persistently informs teachers' practice. As these research results indicate, variability in the quality and capability of teachers' dealing with practical dilemmas must be expected. Therefore, rather than blame teachers themselves or teacher educators for incomplete attention to pedagogical dilemmas, policy consideration should attend to the learning of teachers in their practical school settings. If decisions of teachers are to be informed by competent pedagogical deliberation, special attention must be accorded to construct the social conditions in schools that permit the occurrence of serious reflection. No matter what the teacher's personal and

professional commitments, each teacher is strongly affected by the school's climate. No amount of time spent in college classes can develop sufficiently the skills involved in pedagogical discourse practices; such improvement is attained only through teachers' reflective experience as they work in schools.

Schools all too often engender structures and atmosphere that fail to support pedagogical reflection and behavior of both teachers and students (Power, 1993). Sophistication of pedagogical reasoning largely depends on the existence of forums at which individuals may reasonably deal with such dilemmas. What are the conditions needed for sound professional judgement? Arendt (1989) notes that decision making and meaning are only tested and widened when different meanings exist in a community and when individuals are willing to subject the content of meanings to general debate. Contemporary schools tend not to be such forums. However, according to Colnerud *et al.* (1999), if individuals consider pedagogical reflection in the teaching profession and follow Arendt's demand for a situationally adequate practice connected to decision making, then a number of consequences arise. If educational decision making is based upon discourse, then different meanings must be exposed to public dialogue within the school community. Such a collective exchange of meanings presupposes that many different types of meanings become visible. Consequently, such an exchange presupposes a willingness and means to create conditions for open dialogue. Among its attributes, this situation is a move away from a rule-governed understanding of practice and opens up the number of meanings and descriptions of practice. Finally, collective reflection accepts difference and divergence. It does not regard them as potentially debilitating. One learns to "live with doubt." Then, the key is not unanimous agreement, but discourse and the testing of plural meanings.

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